

Saskatchewan's independent newsmagazine

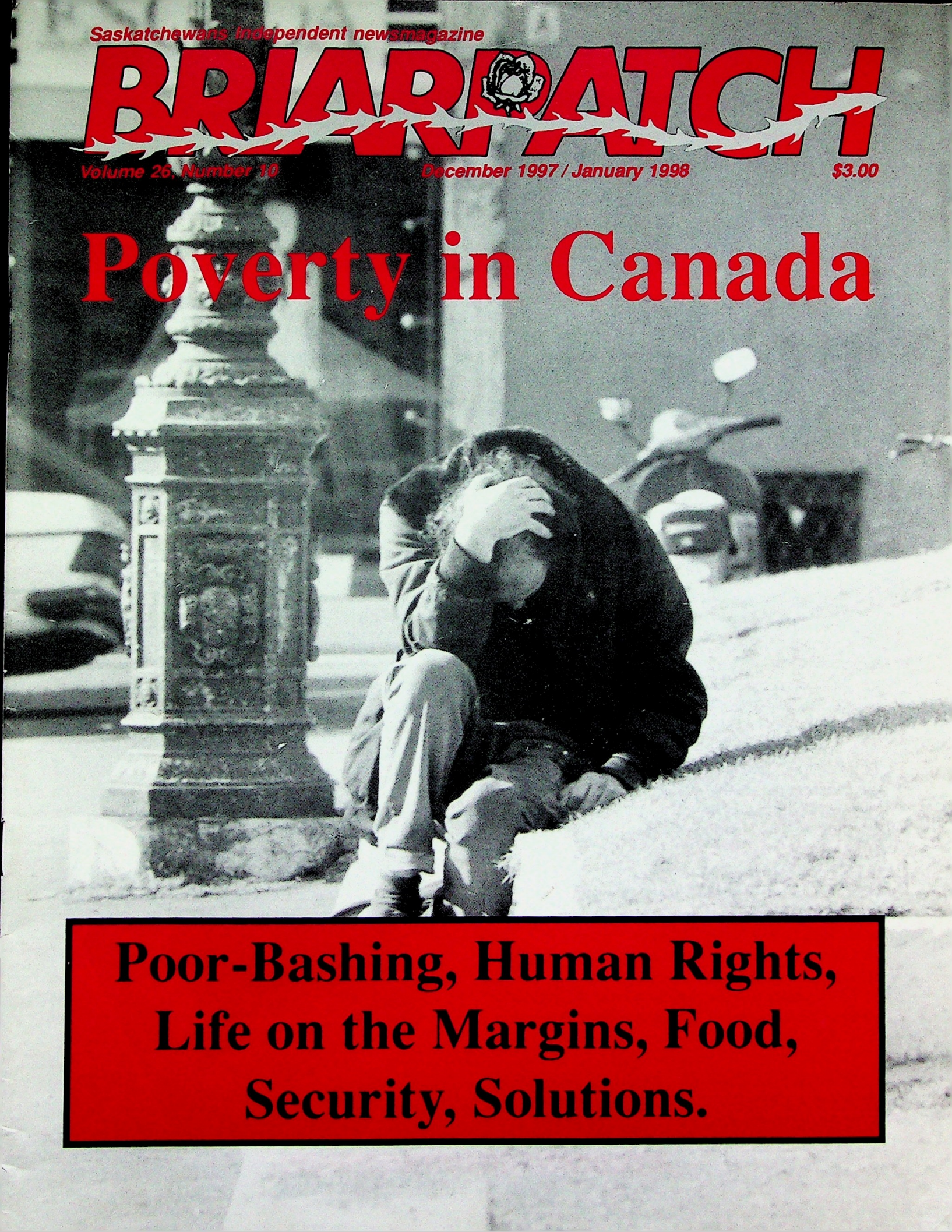
BRIARPATCH

Volume 26, Number 10

December 1997 / January 1998

\$3.00

Poverty in Canada



Poor-Bashing, Human Rights,
Life on the Margins, Food,
Security, Solutions.

MATT SHAW



Matt Shaw, one of the key organizers of the famous On-to-Ottawa Trek of 1935, passed away in October at the age of 87.

During the Great Depression, the federal Tory government of R. B. Bennett forced 167,000 single unemployed men into "relief camps" throughout the country. The unemployed

were forced to perform hard labour and deprived of even the most basic rights.

In response, they formed the Relief Camp Workers' Union, which was affiliated to the Workers' Unity League, a militant union federation under Communist Party leadership.

Shaw became one of the chief organizers for the union as well as one of its best speakers and fundraisers. He soon led major demonstrations aimed at securing the union's slogans: "Work and Wages" and "Jobs and Justice."

Many of the gains made by working people over the last 60 years (which are now under attack by the corporate agenda) can be traced back to the hard work of men and women like Matt Shaw.

We can all learn from Matt's example that we can make this country a much more equitable place to live if we organize against injustice.

ONE NURSES UNION

The Staff Nurses Associations of Alberta joined forces with the United Nurses of Alberta on October 15. After years of discussion and negotiation, UNA's current membership of 13,500 will be enlarged by SNAA's 2,400 members. Members of both organizations overwhelmingly endorsed the amalgamation.

UNA president Heather Smith called it "the single greatest initiative for nurses in Alberta in two decades."

FEMINIST BOOKSTORES

After almost 23 years of feminist bookselling, Everywomans Books in Victoria closed its doors at the end of November. The reason? It's the same one that forced the

Vancouver Women's Bookstore to close in May 1996: financial hardship.

Everywomans Books was the last non-profit, feminist bookstore run by a volunteer collective in Canada. The bookstore cited the rising cost of books, coupled with the rise of mega-bookstores as major factors in their financial downturn.

POLITICAL HAIKU CONTEST

Briarpatch announces a non-competitive, political haiku contest. For those who don't know what a haiku is, it's a poem with a total of 17 syllables: five in the first line, seven in the second line, and five in the last line.

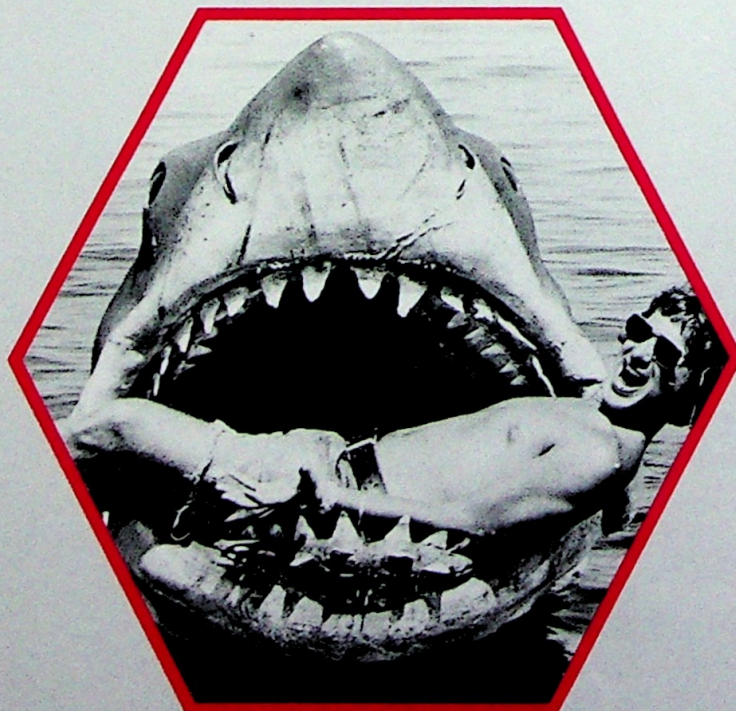
Send your political haiku to Briarpatch by December 31, 1997. Since this is a non-competitive contest, we will be publishing a selection of the haiku's received in a future issue.

In the meantime, we are publishing Terry Wolfwood's haiku called CEOs and Ambassadors.

Dark suits, ties, white shirts
smooth skin over plump flesh
shines
from global power.

BRIARPATCH SWIM-A-THON

A spirited group of swimmers raised over \$1,800 for Briarpatch in October during our fourth annual swim-a-thon. We thank all the swimmers for their efforts, the volunteers who helped at the event, and the many supporters for sponsoring the swimmers.



BRIARPATCH

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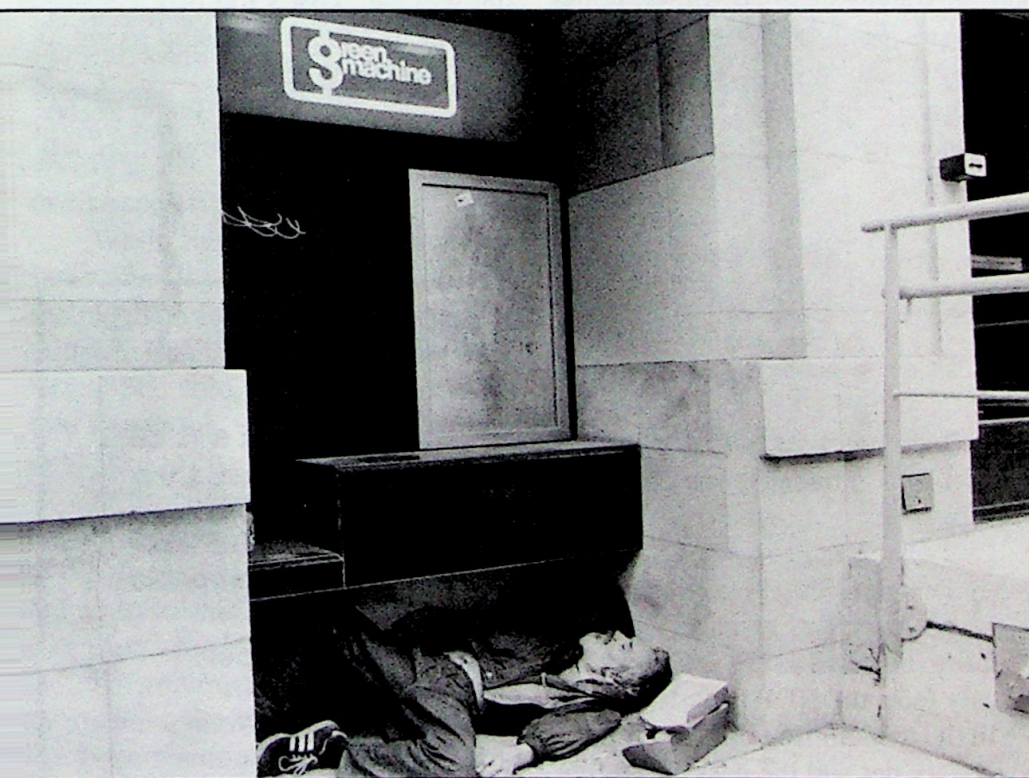
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photo: Darren Ell



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Briarpatch is Saskatchewan's independent alternative newsmagazine committed to building a socialist democratic society. We provide an open forum for disadvantaged peoples and support progressive movements working to change unjust structures and build a genuine political and economic democracy. We support peace, equality, democracy, social justice, Aboriginal self-determination, and the protection of the environment. We oppose the oppression of people on the basis of nation, class, race, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Briarpatch magazine was founded in 1973 and is published ten times a year by Briarpatch Inc., an independent non-profit organization. Many of the articles and photographs in Briarpatch are contributed by volunteers. Deadline for the receipt of articles is 45 days preceding publication. Unsolicited contributions will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Opinions expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the Briarpatch board of directors or staff. Articles may be reproduced provided proper credits are given. Briarpatch is a member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association and the staff are members of RWDSU Local 568. The Briarpatch office is at Huston House, 1138 McIntyre Street, Regina, SK S4P 2R7. Phone (306) 525-2949. One year subscription: \$24.61. Unions & institutions: \$35.31. Publications Mail Registration No. 4171. ISSN 0703-8968. Membership in Briarpatch Inc. is open to groups or individuals upon application and payment of a \$1.00 membership fee. Briarpatch is indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index and Alternative Press Index and available on microform from Micromedia, 20 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5C 2N8 and from the Underground Press Collection, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, U.S.A.

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Darren Ell

LETTERS

Dear Briarpatch,

Briarpatch's October 1997 issue dwells on the subject of racism in a big way. I say: don't stop, ever.

My experience in combatting racism has taught me (1) racism has to be thought of as a medical problem that is chronic; it will never go away completely because it resides (like bacteria) within humans to emerge at the most unexpected opportunity. (2) Racism, like any chronic medical condition, requires eternal vigilance, supervision, and regular check-ups. (3) If one is not actively involved, daily, in combatting this disease, it always erupts and spreads. It especially likes the young. (4) To ignore or tolerate racist remarks, inferences, or blatant racist vandalism or racist-driven violence is to embrace racism. (5) Silence or indifference to any racist (homophobic, misogynistic) harassment is the harasser's friend; silence is akin to conspiracy to hate or scapegoat.

As the great humanist June Callwood says: "There are no innocent bystanders."

Mendelson Joe
co-founder of Artists Against
Racism
Toronto, ON

Dear Briarpatch,

I feel I must respond to Susan Ferren's letter (September 1997) challenging my article comparing Alberta and Saskatchewan politics.

I am happy to agree to disagree with Ms. Ferren on the NDP. She obviously feels the NDP is partly culpable in the dismantling of Canada's social safety net and the passage of free trade. I disagree, noting that the NDP is the only party still talking about free trade and the new MAI. However, we shall leave it at that.

Ms. Ferren takes a stunning leap

of logic when she moves from disagreeing with my analysis to accusing me of "stifling dissent." I did no such thing and how she could read such motivations into my article is beyond fathom.

The purpose of my article was to put some of the debate occurring in Saskatchewan, and on the pages of *Briarpatch*, in perspective. Sharing my thoughts as a left-wing activist in Alberta, Canada's most right-wing province, is an addition to the discussion, not a subtraction.

And nowhere does my article suggest *Briarpatch*, Ms. Ferren or anyone else stop saying what they are saying.

My article was simply a little food for thought. Unfortunately, Ms. Ferren appears to have stopped looking at the menu, and already decided what meal she will eat. That's too bad, because none of us should ever stop trying to learn something new.

Jason Foster
Edmonton, AB

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What if we choose to reduce the harm?

Inside This Briarpatch

Briarpatch is pleased to produce this special issue on poverty. The theme of this issue is solutions to eradi-

cate poverty in Canada. Although many people were involved in the project, special thanks must be given to the project coordinators: Peter Gilmer, Lorelee Manning, Guy Marsden, Tiffany McHugh and Bonnie Morton.

Joyce Reilly

In memory of a welfare rights activist.

by Bob Gay & Bonnie Morton

In October, a memorial service for Joyce Reilly brought together members of her family and over 40 people who knew the work she had done in Regina. Both groups remember Joyce's strong personality and her blunt way of attacking the injustices of Canadian society.

While fighting for her own welfare rights, Joyce helped other welfare recipients to found the Ad Hoc Committee to Realistically Change Welfare Rates. She sold two editions of welfare handbook which the committee published to city counsellors.

At the close of the memorial service, one family member proudly pointed to the display of her pictures: "Joyce fed soup to 2,000 people across the street from the Ramada Hotel."

We remember her courage by overcoming the fear of retaliation from the Department of Social Services by encouraging other welfare recipients to speak out for social change.

People across Canada got to know Joyce and her work. She attended many workshops and sent 42 hand-written notes to MPs and MLAs. She went to stores to research the inadequacy of



children's clothing allowances. Joyce told journalism students what it was really like to be on welfare. She fought for family allowances and for the disability pension increase not to be deducted dollar for dollar. Joyce told politicians and welfare workers and all of us in no uncertain terms of the changes that were needed so low-income peo-

ple could have social justice.

Kidney failure and dialysis was one more challenge Joyce had to face.

We dedicate this special issue of *Briarpatch* to Joyce Reilly.

Bob Gay is a retired United Church minister. Bonnie Morton is a human rights activist.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY ORGANIZATION:

POVERTY SUCKS.

NAPO IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION THAT REPRESENTS LOW-INCOME CANADIANS AND WE ARE LOOKING FOR NEW MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS. OUR GOAL IS THE ELIMINATION OF POVERTY IN CANADA. MEMBERSHIP IS AVAILABLE TO INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT SHARE OUR GOAL.

WHAT WE DO

- RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT POVERTY AND ISSUES OF CONCERN TO LOW-INCOME CANADIANS;
- ADVOCATE THE CONCERNS , VALUES AND WISHES OF LOW-INCOME CANADIANS SO THAT THEY ARE REFLECTED IN PUBLIC POLICY;
- GATHER AND CARRY OUT RESEARCH ON ISSUES OF CONCERN TO LOW-INCOME CANADIANS; AND
- WORK WITH LOCAL ACTIVISTS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE POVERTY.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION OR IF YOU ARE INTERESTED MEMBERSHIP OR MAKING A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR WORK WRITE, CALL, FAX OR EMAIL US.

ZERO
Poverty!

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Strategies for Anti-Poverty Work in Canada

Activities to fight poverty.

by Lynne Toupin & Mike Farrell

It is likely that poverty in some form has existed since humans first began to organize themselves into societies. Human lives are inherently unpredictable and despite the most well thought out plans, unexpected misfortune can often occur. Family crisis, significant downturns in the economy, or industrial restructuring are the most frequent causes of poverty in Canada today.

The so-called economic boom of the last few years has brought expanding wealth to higher income earners, but very little wealth has trickled down to people with the lowest incomes. Good-paying jobs have become increasingly hard to find as improvements in technology are lessening the need for labour, while an emphasis on cost reduction is pressuring businesses to lay off workers or to rely more on part-time workers. The decrease in demand for labour combined with reductions in social support programs during the 1990s has led to an increasing number of Canadians who are living in poverty.

Poverty in Canada

In Canada, the most accepted tool to measure poverty is Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs line (LICOs), commonly referred to as the poverty line. There are different poverty lines depending on the size of city and size of family. For a large city in 1995, the poverty lines were set at \$16,874 for an individual and \$31,753 for a family of four.

In 1995, 17.8 percent of Canadians or 5,205,000 Canadians were living below the poverty line. The province with the highest rate was Québec (21.3 percent), while Prince Edward Island had the lowest with 12.8 percent.

Members of certain groups in Canada face a higher risk of poverty, such as unattached individuals (39.3 percent), unattached women (44.4 percent), female single-par-



photos: Darren Ell

ents (56.8 percent), children (21 percent), seniors (18.7 percent), native peoples, and people with disabilities.

The rate of poverty has been increasing fairly steadily from 14.1 percent in 1989 (3,770,000 Canadians) to 17.8 percent in 1995 (5,205,000 Canadians). The rate of poverty is only one part of the story. There is also depth of poverty, or how far below the poverty line people are living. The information in Table 1 includes the average amount of shortfall for families and individuals who live in poverty.

Table 1

Year	Poverty rate	People living in poverty	Average below poverty line
1989	14.1%	3,770,000	\$6,184
1990	15.4%	4,179,000	\$6,381
1991	16.5%	4,543,000	\$6,630
1992	17.0%	4,757,000	\$6,488
1993	18.0%	5,143,000	\$6,501
1994	17.1%	4,941,000	\$6,469
1995	17.8%	5,205,000	\$6,659

Poverty and Source of Income

There is a popular misconception that the poor in Canada do not work. The facts show otherwise. In 1995, 78 percent of poor unattached individuals worked either full-time or part-time, and 61 percent of poor family heads of households worked. The greater the number of weeks of work, the less likely for individuals or families to live in poverty, although the poverty rate for individuals with 49 to 52 weeks of work was still 14.3 percent and for couples with at least 93 weeks of work together, the poverty rate was 2.7 percent.

Poverty is often the result of inadequate social assistance levels and/or minimum wage rates that do not provide a living wage. In 1995, welfare rates in all provinces were below the poverty line, ranging from a low of 24 percent of the poverty line for single employables in New Brunswick to a high of 69 percent of the poverty line for a couple with two children in Prince Edward Island. Unfortunately, working full-time for minimum wage is no longer a guarantee of living above the poverty line. In 1995, working full-time at minimum wage rates in all provinces would provide an income below the poverty line, ranging from a low of 55 percent of the poverty line for an individual working in Prince Edward Island or Newfoundland, to a high of 81 percent for an individual working in British Columbia.

There is also more information surfacing that indicates that the instability of the job market (layoffs, increase in

part-time employment, etc.) may be causing significant numbers of people moving into and out of poverty. A recent Statistics Canada report concluded that from 1993 to 1994, 1,238,000 Canadians fell below the poverty line and 846,000 rose above the poverty line.

The New Social Policy Environment

The introduction of the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1995 combined with reductions in the amount of transfers to provinces represented a dramatic shift in federal/provincial responsibility for social welfare programs. Prior to the CHST, these programs were cost shared between the federal government and the provinces and therefore, national standards were technically enforceable through federal government spending power. After the CHST came into effect, there is no cost sharing obligation and the size of the federal transfers have been reduced to the point that the threat of federal spending withdrawal has significantly less impact. Since the CHST is a block transfer of funds for health, post-secondary education and social assistance, the provinces are now also able to shift money out of social assistance into social programs that enjoy broader public support. Increasingly provinces are passing on the cuts in federal transfers to individuals in the form of less social support, decreased services and more user fees for public services.

Although this was the initial consequence of the CHST,



"challenging attitudes on poverty"

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Policy makers and service provider organizations across the country struggle to respond appropriately and effectively to the needs of the poor in the context of a society characterized by huge differences between those who have and those who have not. This unique curriculum and video takes participants through extensive information and self-examination challenging them to re-think their attitudes and actions.

For more information on how to obtain this important resource, please contact **NAPO - The National Anti-Poverty Organization**, 440 - 325 Dalhousie Street, Ottawa, ON, K1N 7G2. TEL (613) 789-0096 FAX (613) 789-0141.

NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY ORGANIZATION
ORGANISATION NATIONALE ANTI-PAUVRETÉ

it is now becoming obvious that an important outgrowth has been the shift in power and responsibility for social policy development from the federal government to the provinces. Social policy renewal in Canada is now being "coordinated" by the Provincial/Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal.

The Constraints We Face

If we are to be successful in developing, advocating and pushing forward progressive options to deal with the problem of poverty in Canada, we must recognize the constraints that we face. The following five constraints present considerable barriers to the traditional way that social policy advocates have operated.

1. Decrease of federal involvement in social policy

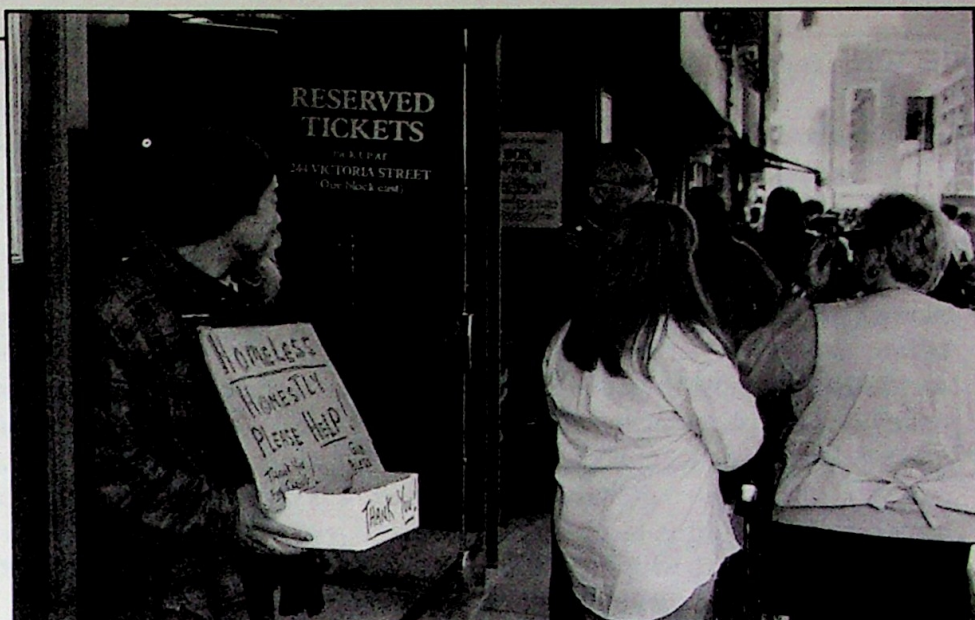
Attempts to advocate social policy changes at the federal level are increasingly running into a brick wall - decision-making at the federal level has been superseded by the federal/provincial/territorial process. Two important consequences of this development are the erosion of the concept of national standards for social programs and the lack of a coordinating body for the collection and evaluation of data related to social programs.

2. Lack of public support for increasing levels of income support, particularly for welfare

There has been a distinct hardening of public attitudes towards the poor which is likely related to the general increase in economic insecurity of Canadians and the promotion of negative stereotypes of the poor. This hardening of attitudes may also be related to the erosion of universality in social programs in favour of the approach of targeting programs to those most in need. This approach tends to isolate those in need and make them more vulnerable to discrimination. Regardless of the reason, it seems clear that there is little public support for increasing levels of welfare - if anything, the public might encourage further reductions because of a growing lack of faith in the effectiveness of social assistance programs in alleviating poverty and the belief that the poor are entirely to blame for their circumstances.

3. Lack of resources for organizations developing progressive social policy

Funding cutbacks from governments have imposed greater financial burdens on non-profit organizations whose traditional role has been to advocate progressive solutions on behalf of marginalized groups. This has led to increased



competition for funding alternatives and a tendency to focus on core issues that affect small groups of the population. This retrenchment has made it harder for organizations to participate in coalitions and to develop and advocate integrated approaches to reforming social policy.

4. Difficulty in organizing people living in poverty

People living in poverty are often extremely focused on meeting their basic needs which leaves little time or energy to get involved in advocating for policy changes. In addition, the recent increase in poor bashing or discrimination against the poor creates an atmosphere that discourages people living in poverty from speaking out. Therefore, it can be difficult to organize and mobilize people living in poverty to fight back against the injustices that they face.

5. Increased support by the corporate sector for repressive social policy options

The corporate sector has significant financial resources compared to the non-profit sector and they are becoming increasingly active in bringing those resources to bear on social policy. It is in their interests if income support programs are reduced and eligibility is tightened as it will keep their work-force more compliant.

Progressive Policy Options

Despite these constraints, there is still considerable room to maneuver. If we take a strategic approach to work for change, there are a number of opportunities to shift social policy to a more humane agenda. There are two important things that we must do to take advantage of these opportunities. The first is to focus on certain activities that will be effective in the current climate. The second is to improve the effectiveness of these different activities by using them to complement each other in the pursuit of common objectives.

The key activities should include:

1. Research

High quality information is an essential tool in today's policy environment. Accurate and timely research plays an important role in helping to decipher the public relations spin that every government uses when they release discussion papers, reports, policies, or proposed legislation. Even before cutbacks in funding for social policy organizations and the lessening of the federal government's role in social policy, it was challenging to collect, analyze, and distribute information about government policies, their impact on the poor, and alternative policies. Now, information is much harder to find, and it is much more difficult to spare the resources for research when the demand for providing services is so high. Research capability in the progressive policy sector must be maintained and enhanced.

2. Education

Education is important, but not just the education of people living in poverty about their rights and the consequences of policy changes. Education can also be directed at private and public sector service providers to improve access for people living in poverty to necessary services like health care or banking. It is often a condition of ignorance rather than malice that provokes service providers to discriminate against the poor.

Education must also be directed more broadly to encourage greater understanding of poverty among moderate income earners and decision makers. Although politicians are influenced by corporate lobbyists and the wealthy, they ultimately try to propose policies that the majority of the public will support. If the public demonstrates support for progressive policy alternatives to alleviate poverty, politicians will reflect that support in their policies.

3. Organizing, Advocating and Lobbying at the Provincial Level

The new federal/provincial/territorial process requires a substantial redirection of efforts on the part of anti-poverty organizations in many provinces. A strong capacity for interprovincial communication between groups is still needed, however, it is much more important now to have strong networks of closely linked organizations within each province to improve information-sharing and coordinate joint action.

4. Strengthen Cross-Sectoral Integration

The need for collaboration among public policy advocates has become an imperative as a result of the onslaught of the corporate agenda combined with cutbacks in funding to the non-profit sector. Every organization (whether they advocate for rights for the poor, women, people with dis-

abilities, consumers, racial and ethnic minorities, or other groups excluded from power) is facing the same problem: the demands for services have increased while resources have diminished or stayed the same.

The idea of coalitions is not new, but it has now become a way of maintaining service levels and encouraging a more comprehensive approach to progressive public policy that integrates and harmonizes the needs of different groups in society. Some of the main obstacles tend to be defining the specific roles for different organizations to play, ensuring that all partners have an equal opportunity to participate, and respecting each other's interests. For example, labour organizations and anti-poverty organizations have the potential to be strong allies in advancing progressive alternatives, but these obstacles have inhibited the process.

5. Increase Focus on Local Community Development

As important as it is to work for broad legislative changes and stronger enforcement of existing rights legislation, it is not enough. Why? Because laws that are created and enforced from the top down are not effective at creating long-term changes of attitudes and behaviours in the people who need to change. These laws are important and necessary, but they will not ensure a just society where wealth and income are distributed equitably.

To reduce discrimination and increase social and economic justice, people of different socio-economic backgrounds need to interact and learn that they have much more in common than not. Community development has the potential to be a more inclusive approach to encouraging greater understanding between people of different circumstances while simultaneously addressing the needs of a community through investing and rebuilding the resources, skills, and the social and economic foundations of communities.

Community development provides the opportunity for people living in poverty to be involved from the very beginning in developing the solution to get them out of poverty. It will not be a solution that is being forced on them from the top down - like the ones that we, as social policy activists, have been criticizing for decades.

There are a number of activities - research, advocacy, community development, civil disobedience, etc. - that are currently being used in the fight against poverty. The most important thing we need to do now is recognize the value of different approaches, focus our resources in those areas where we can have the most impact, coordinate our different activities so that they all work towards the same objectives and develop stronger capacity at the local level for sustainable social and economic development.

Lynne Toupin is the Executive Director of the National Anti-Poverty Organization. Mike Farrell is the Assistant Director of the National Anti-Poverty Organization.

No CAP in Hand

The government has virtually eliminated universal social programs.

by Bonnie Morton

Before 1966 Canada, like many countries around the world, struggled to find ways of dealing with poverty and the inequities that stem from living in poverty. Canada faced the problem of many economic differences across the nation, but one economic difference stood out: poverty.

Some provinces had more people per capita living in poverty, and differing extents of poverty, such as Saskatchewan and Newfoundland. It became very clear that inequities existed because all people were not guaranteed specific rights and protections.

The United Nations (of which Canada has been and still is a key player) recognized that for a country to realize a healthy social and economic environment it would have to ensure that all citizens were guaranteed social, economic, civil and political rights. It was also recognized that no citizen could fully participate in civil and political rights if they were not first guaranteed specific social and economic rights.

Canada has been a staunch supporter of the rights and protections set out by the UN and has ratified both the Eco-

nomic, Social, and Cultural Rights Covenant, and the Civil and Political Rights Covenant. Not only did Canada ratify these rights, the federal government took specific steps to enshrine these rights without our national laws and legislation. One such piece of legislation was called the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP).

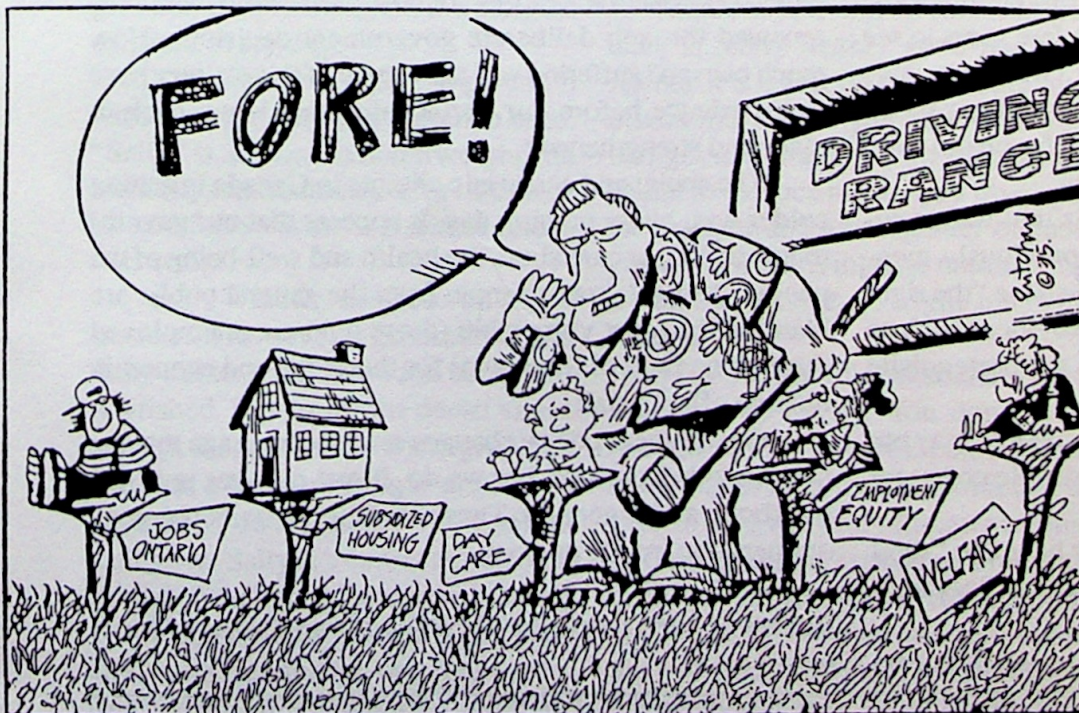
CAP was enacted in 1966. Under this legislation both the federal and provincial governments agreed to be responsible for the financing and protection for the specific social and economic rights of all Canadians.

These two levels of government guaranteed to provide and protect the following four rights of all Canadians: the right to income when in need; the right to appeal; the right not to have to work for public assistance (the right to work freely chosen); and the right to assistance no matter which province you are from.

It should be noted that these are the only social and economic rights Canadians have ever had, and that you would first have to be poor to realize these rights.

CAP was a double-edged sword; it was both a social and economic plan that would work towards creating a more equitable society. It was believed that if set up properly, this plan would in turn create a much healthier society and economy. The plan in 1966 was to create social programs and use our tax system to financially ensure that all citizens had access to necessary programs. This approach would ensure that citizens had social and economic protections, and begin the process of lowering poverty rates and closing inequity gaps, so people could fully realize their civil and political rights.

The most important factors of the CAP legislation were the four rights that were guaranteed to all Canadians. At one point CAP and the development plans around this legislation were on track, but over time many changes have occurred to drastically alter the original



intent of this legislation.

First, governments started giving tax breaks to large corporations and wealthy people. Then, through various trade agreements, many jobs disappeared from our country, while our social programs were deemed as unfair subsidies by outside interests. Most recently, we find our federal government deliberately dismantling valuable social programs by withdrawing financial support and by ignoring its responsibility to protect specific rights.

Although a number of government decisions have brought us to today's social and economic reality, nothing has had a more devastating effect on social and economic security than finance minister Paul Martin's 1995 federal budget. It was through this budget that the federal government opted out of its responsibility to cost-share social programs, in return allowing provincial governments the power to decide how they will spend their sparse federal transfer payments.

The federal government repealed CAP, replacing it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). The CHST does not guarantee social and economic rights. It mostly sets out the guarantees around health care, but no other programs.

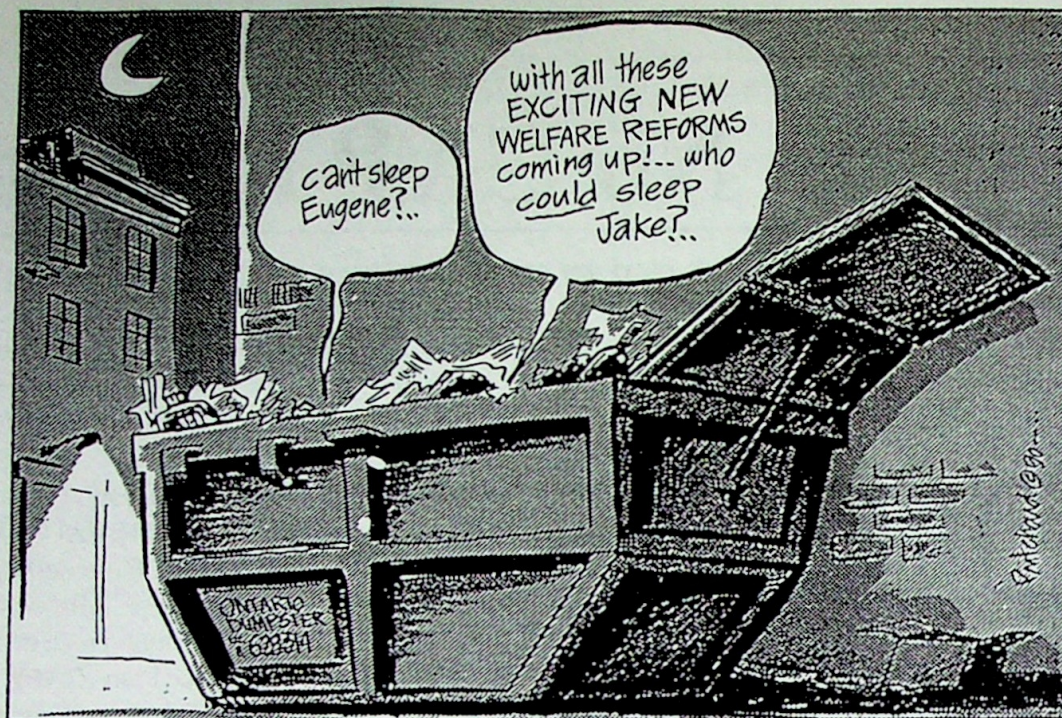
The elimination of CAP means that the federal government is no longer the centralized body responsible for ensuring equitable social and economic protections exist for all Canadians. We don't have to wait a few years to see the effects this will have on our country. Two short years after Paul Martin's 1995 budget, universality of our social programs has virtually disappeared, except for health care, and even that seems to be on shaky ground.

The most noticeable of all changes is that within social services. The CAP rights that were previously mentioned no longer exist. No longer do people have "the right of work freely chosen." In a number of provinces such as New Brunswick and Ontario, workfare is the prerequisite for welfare benefits.

In many cases if work is not available, people may not receive benefits of any kind, which means people no longer have the "right to income when in need."

People on social assistance no longer have the "right to appeal" the behaviour of their social worker in Saskatchewan.

Although it is assumed that the "right to assistance no



matter which province you are from" still exists, the growing reality is that many people are being denied financial assistance. Most of these people are transients.

It appears that the worst is yet to come. The Ontario government is looking at introducing Bill 142. If this legislation goes through it means that people on welfare may be forced into providing fingerprints, be required to pay back the welfare benefits they receive, and will not be covered by employment standards when they are forced to participate in workfare programs.

There is no guarantee that any province will eventually provide social assistance to people when there is no work, leaving them with no alternative to earn money to feed themselves and their families. It is clear that the inequities that existed across this country before 1966 have been renewed through deliberate government decisions. How much pain and suffering will the people of this country have to experience before our social safety net is put back in place and strengthened?

The social and economic climate in Canada is getting colder with every passing day. It appears that our governments no longer care about the health and well-being of the people. As well, many people from the general public are blaming the most vulnerable (those who are unemployed through no fault of their own) for the social and economic ills that affect us all.

Government policy changes send the message that we have no other options, but we do. It just requires political backbone and ingenuity. These seem to be traits our governments no longer possess.

Bonnie Morton works for the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry.

Life on the Margins

*What's it like living in poverty?
Four people tell their stories.*

by Peter Gilmer & Lorelee Manning

Jobs, money and housing. Those are the most pressing problems for people in poverty according to a recent survey of 60 new clients of the Regina & District Food Bank.

Several of those surveyed said they had a grade 12 or better education and many were working while receiving supplements from social assistance.

An important finding of this survey was people were prepared to undertake the rigors and cost of additional training only if this training would result in a "real" job - having enough money to support themselves and their families and access to employment-related benefits. These same issues are echoed in the real life stories of some people living on social assistance.

Each person's story is unique and offers us a glimpse of the many struggles that people living on the margins confront every day.

The first story is of a single mom with three pre-school children to raise. "Sally" is 30 pounds underweight and seriously malnourished. Her nutritionist said Sally "is the worst case I have ever seen."

Sally's family has been on social assistance for several generations and Sally thinks she has always been malnourished. Whenever she doesn't have enough money for food, she gives her children a flavoured sugar drink with vitamin C added. Sally can't afford fruit juice. Sally is a caring parent concerned about her children's well-being.

Last summer Sally and her children went hungry for two days every week. This situation lasted for three

months. Her family of four was only receiving \$95 per week for food. Sally had no money for clothing or personal and household expenses.

Sally's youngest child was apprehended by Social Services and placed in foster care at the age of 12 months. The reason: failure to thrive.

While in foster care, the child ate and grew. In six months, the child was strong enough to return home. The question arises: why did this child do better in foster care than with his own family? The answer for this family is simple: Saskatchewan Assistance Plan benefit levels failed to provide enough money for Sally to properly care for her children.

"Ernie" is middle-aged and has been on and off social assistance for several years depending on job prospects in his field.

Ernie says living on social assistance is really neither good nor bad. Rather it's a fact of life for him and others like him - "you take what you can get and that's it." To manage on social assistance means you give up a lot - where and what quality of food you can buy, driving and maintaining a vehicle, or even a night out with friends.

The fact is life on social assistance is very lonely. You don't have enough money to participate in community activities, for transportation, or even to save for your retirement. Ernie thinks that social assistance programs need to catch up with current economic reality and that people on social assistance should be able to keep more of what they can earn. Benefit levels need

to better reflect what it costs to live and governments need to realize that access to transportation is an essential service that should be available to all, not only to those who can pay.

Ernie says, "When you're a single guy and on social assistance, it's hard to get a date. Once a female finds out you aren't working and you're on social assistance, some don't want anything to do with you."

"Ann" is a single mother with four children, two of which are teenagers. Ann says that living on social assistance is "just awful, both frustrating and anger-provoking." Until recently Ann was raising her four children on the meagre social assistance allowance provided by the Saskatchewan Social Assistance Plan. She states that managing means giving up a lot: "no birthday parties for the children, no money for gifts, having to put groceries back because you don't have enough money to pay for your family's food needs, and no money to purchase or replace winter clothing."

Social Services, she says, requires a seemingly endless array of forms and requirements but provides no money for transportation to attend meetings. One essential change would be to ensure that families have the benefits they need to raise their children and to participate fully in their communities. Most importantly, Ann thinks that people living on social assistance need to be given back their dignity.

"Dale" is a middle-aged man deemed a single employable by Saskatchewan Social Services. Several years ago the income from Dale's job

became sporadic. He went four months with almost no money when the person he was making house payments to insisted he apply for social assistance to stabilize his house payments. Since then Dale has lived what he calls the "draining existence of living year after year on an income that never meets my needs." This prevents him from focusing on the future because each day is a struggle just to get by.

Dale says the last ten days before his welfare cheque arrives are particularly difficult. "I go into a survivalist mentality and feel I have nothing in common with the rest of society. I watch TV and it gives me the impression that real people are consumers living the good life. Having sufficient income would put me in a different headspace, but I can hardly remember what that's like."

Family celebrations like Christmas and birthdays are also tough times for Dale because he can never fully participate. He says, "There is always a strong urge to buy gifts knowing that if I do they will be in place of buying food or paying a bill. And if anyone asks me to take part in an activity that costs more than a few dollars, I have

to say no."

Aside from such frivolities, Dale reuses coffee filters and lives on a less than nutritious diet supplemented by the food bank. He can't consider completing necessary maintenance on his house.

Dale would like to see a shift in attitudes whereby government and the public believed that people on assistance are entitled to an income that allows them to live a dignified life. He wants governments to see the need for decent-paying, full-time jobs and not the creation of more "life-sucking part-time, low-wage positions" like the ones he has experienced.

Dale believes "the means testing done by Social Services gives the impression that a welfare cheque is a stop-gap for yuppies who are having a bad month when, unfortunately, it is the lifeblood for most recipients. If it is tampered with for a day or two [like when welfare cheques are late], it is like life or death."

Dale believes that as a poor person all his rights have been stripped away without cause and without a fight. "Not only are you the victim of economic violence, but you are blamed

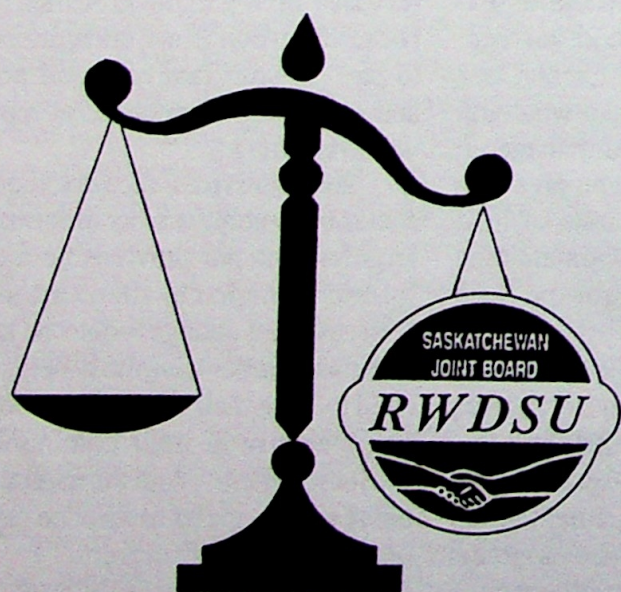
for being one."

All these stories demonstrate living on social assistance is a hand-to-mouth existence. All one's energy must be invested in surviving. There's no time or any resources left over to plan for the future. All you can do is hope things will be better tomorrow.

Surely, in a country as rich as Canada, there should be no people going hungry part of each month. Surely social assistance payments can be made to more closely reflect what it costs to purchase sufficient food, appropriate clothing, and decent housing. And surely, our governments can intervene in the market so that "real" jobs are created and sustained.

What is needed is a government that is prepared to truly invest in people and show leadership in the fight against poverty.

Peter Gilmer works for the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry. Lorelee Manning is the executive director of the Council on Social Development Regina Inc. and is a member of the Advocacy and Community Development Committee of the Regina & District Food Bank.



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The Grass Roots Challenge

Food security strategy and grass roots solutions.

by David Northcott

In a northern Ethiopian village, the struggle for water, food, fuel and shelter goes on daily in a country that has seen this depth of poverty for many generations. Their struggle is powerful and subject to the whims of global charity, conflict, poor government policy, weather, unfair business practices and the World Bank's demands on their country's financial health. That country, half a world away, is proud of its struggle towards becoming a food secure nation

without the injections of charitable food from countries that have more than enough to feed their own people.

It is remarkable to see the Canadian Food Grains Bank working strategically with local Ethiopian villages and partnerships to deliver food in a way that strengthens the local economy, and stabilizes the humble infrastructure by assisting the village to construct earth dams and water systems to respond to the daily demand for drinkable water.

From a country that has seen the ravages of famine and drought, the actions of local village partnerships and some Canadian charities and churches have made a small difference in an overwhelmingly difficult and challenging struggle towards food security.

If victories are measured on such a small scale, half a world away, shouldn't Canadians measure success on the same scale? Since Canada has publicly endorsed its commitment to global food security, how do we deliver that



Winnipeg's Vegetable Grow-a-Row school project.

sense of food security when the gap between rich and poor continues to grow every year? The UN defines food security when all people at all times have both physical and economic access, on a sustainable basis, to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life. That means adequate availability to food, access to food, and proper utilization of food.

As many Canadian low-income families are losing ground, we are seeing a growing response from the non-profit or charitable sector. A majority of community people and participants at food banks volunteer a considerable amount of their time to pick up the slack for Canada's attempts at becoming food secure. As we have dismantled our universal and human rights-based social programs, we are seeing more Canadians depend upon the voluntary and charitable sector to make ends meet on a monthly basis.

Just as the Ethiopian experience shows the strength of

a grass roots microeconomic solution, we need to ask and challenge ourselves in the same way. If Canada cannot deliver food security at a neighbourhood or a grass roots level, then we need to look seriously at where our efforts are going. If families in local neighbourhoods do not have physical or economic access on a sustainable basis to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life, then the social program must be challenged or changed or thrown out.

Grass roots solutions have been able to create food distribution programs that help supply and provide the basic needs for a family to survive on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. As well, by developing self-help models that encourage active community participation and the process of the community response, they encourage families and neighbourhoods to get actively involved in all aspects of the decision making, as well as the delivery of basic food programs. If those basic tenants of food security can be met at a grass roots level then the last challenge is to work together to look at solutions that will change the social safety net, and knit together those tears and breaks that continue to hurt people and their families. While we feel the impact of broken social contracts, the community tries to survive the best way it can.

Grass roots solutions are measured at a family and neighbourhood level and provide an environment that provides the three dimensions of food security. Partnerships improve availability and access as well as information and training that improves all of our utilization of food.

Winnipeg Harvest, where I work, is an imperfect stepping stone towards a community that can work to end the food bank experience by utilizing community assets for a healthier environment. Over 120,000 volunteer hours are donated to Winnipeg Harvest each year, and over 80 per cent are clients that use Winnipeg Harvest services.

The team base at Winnipeg Harvest takes advantage of surplus training programs offered by the Bank of Commerce, in a unique program called Learning Plus One. Team members can improve their skills and abilities with industry standard recognized training courses sponsored by a strong economic partner. This looks significantly better on a resumé than one of the many welfare-sponsored training courses that close more doors than they open.

A partnership of four non-profit community-based groups in Winnipeg supports a mentoring program for low-income mothers. Women who have survived raising children on low incomes, provide an opportunity for one-on-one mentorship with women who are currently trapped in the punishing low-income cycle. They actively listen and respond to the true needs of a low-income person. The non-profit partners have had to change their traditional program responses to react directly to the needs that the mother and mentor identify.

Winnipeg Harvest shares food with over 220 programs throughout Winnipeg in an attempt to make food available at the neighbourhood level. We try to meet basic needs while encouraging the next step of active community participation, one that will provide a self-help model while moving towards some degree of hope in a changing environment. If we can continue that goal at the grass roots level, then the impact of the changes that are directly related to individuals and families whose lives are impacted the most are measured directly.

The grass roots challenge is to move beyond survival programs of support from local food programs and soup kitchens to neighbourhood-based actions that move people towards and hopefully over the poverty line. That will be the measure of their success, a community that is so food secure that food banks and soup kitchens will be forced to close for lack of any activity.

The grass roots speaks in many voices. Our challenge is to listen.

David Northcott is co-ordinator of Winnipeg Harvest Inc., a non-profit organization committed to distributing surplus food.

When I give food
to the poor, they
call me a saint.

When I ask why
the poor have no
food, they call me
a communist.

- Dom Helder Camara

Regina Local



People or Profiteers?

*Community Economic Development is one piece
of the puzzle to end poverty in Canada.*

by T i f f a n y M c H u g h

The word "community" is a must in every populist's bag of trick phrases this year. It's the name of the game and ranks close behind "partnerships" and "competitiveness" in popularity amongst politicians. But, it can come in handy for common folk too, to make whatever you're trying to sell seem less self-interested and more authentically of, by, and for the people.

It's not surprising that the "community" brand of economic development has also seen a revival at a time when public funds and responsibilities are being withdrawn from communities. Yet many of those who proclaim the virtues of "community" also hold the cult of the individual and the capitalist economic model sacred. Unfortunately, the modern day cult hero is the multinational profiteer, not the community organizer or the person who makes scant ends meet by sharing with neighbours or family.

The profiteer, whose favour all governments vie for, has no home or attachments. He's a lone ranger out conquering markets in people and products. He's shopping for the best deal. He not only lives by an internal moral code, but with the help of our governments, imposes his laws on the rest of us in the form of free trade agreements.

The most recent back room bargain - the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) - which is being forged with little input from the people, will expand and level the profiteer's playing field and could prohibit, by law, any attempt to create non-profit institutions to meet our own needs. In the rigged game set out in the MAI, the public sector is said to have an "unfair advantage" in the market.

Instead of investing to create healthy sustainable industry, governments (who hold many of our assets) often respond to private speculation by selling off common resources at fire-sale prices in the world-wide going-out-of-business sale. Or, the public funds that were to be used to meet collective needs are used to subsidize private industry, clean up environmental messes caused by corporations, and pay hefty interest payments to banks.

Despite differences in impact on people in various coun-

tries, there is real commonality: The battle the world over is for land, housing, food supply, health, education, communications, culture and freedom of expression. The battle is over who owns what and whom - the people or the profiteers.

**Unfortunately, the
modern day cult hero is
the multinational
profiteer, not the
community organizer.**

This opposition between the common good and the profiteer's interests may be lost on those who use the term "community" as a reflex, but it is not lost on many people in "marginal communities" where attempts to lure outside investment have failed - destroying cultures and leaving them impoverished and underemployed. Often, but not always, it is those regions or groups of people that have been hardest hit by "investment" (exploitation) and subsequent divestment (the "one industry" town, aboriginal communities and inner city neighbourhoods) who decide to take matters into their own hands.

Community Economic Development (CED) has a long history of struggle to create mutuality and equality within economic and social relations. It can begin with a few people discussing a shared need around a kitchen table. Informal economies, such as local bartering networks and hire-a-neighbour programs, are often the first step in sharing wealth, building ties with one another, and reclaiming con-

trol over our economies. However, in CED, it is not only economic issues that are important, but also resistance to the loss of our social and cultural lives to corporate Generica.

In 1941, people in the Evangeline region of Prince Edward Island decided to become self-reliant by starting a number of co-operatives that would provide employment, create funds for social programs for youth and preserve Acadian culture. Over a period of five decades, initiatives have included a French language cable network, six housing co-operatives, a potato chip factory, and a children's clothing manufacturing co-operative. By 1991 one in every two households had someone employed in a co-operative. The co-operative sector in that region is now larger than both the public and private sectors combined. Clam bakes and a yearly Acadian festival help to build cohesion and celebrate local talent within the region of 2,500 people.

The housing arena has also been a key site for creating employment, adequate shelter, economic security and fostering shared household activities, including communal eating arrangements, maintenance funding pools and child care.

Pilot projects in Saskatchewan by Prince Albert's West Flats, Saskatoon's Quint Development and Regina North Central's HOPE Housing use co-operatives to hold and "buy down" mortgages on housing that will be transferred to co-op members after five years. Participants will also receive support in the way of home ownership, as well as maintenance and repair workshops. In all three pilots, the initiative of inner city residents, along with the co-operation of private and public sector allies, has changed economic conditions so that people have some foundation for building their lives.

A more fledgling CED player is the Core Community Group in Regina, which used a hire-a-neighbour program as the first step to promote local employment, sharing of wealth and breaking social isolation. While the program has provided odd jobs for a number of people, more intense effort will focus on setting up a community-based training, education and support system for those who are underemployed in the construction-related field. Local training will complement a volunteer housing inspection program, a housing registry that gives a "stamp of approval" to landlords who maintain adequate affordable housing and a disputes negotiations process to "encourage" the repair and upgrade of housing in the area. Funding for the first year of this project comes from Human Resources Development Canada, Homegrown Solutions (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) and through a partnership with the Women's Construction Co-operative.

The Women's Construction Co-operative is a group of seven women who get their training hours by working, primarily to create accessible housing. All of these women were previously on social assistance and many are single parents. They believe that they stand a better chance of

providing for their families by working in the construction trades than they would in what have traditionally been "women's" fields, which tend to receive lower pay.

Lest CED sounds like a fairy tale, most of the co-operatives in Evangeline as well as those currently trying to get a foothold in Saskatchewan have faced major obstacles to their success, including trouble accessing finances and technical expertise. Many have met their demise due to insufficient infrastructure, private sector resistance or lack of public acceptance of community enterprise. Ironically, our provincial government has created extensive structures of support for the private sector, but not for community-based enterprise. If all the research, public relations efforts, lost revenue and subsidies being poured into a hog processing plant that is likely to eliminate small hog farmers and damage the environment were invested in building housing or green houses and added-value processing for organic farmers, we'd live in quite a different world.

It's action, not speech, that makes the difference between community economic development and wooing the profiteers. People's will to create ethical industries that meet their needs will continue with or despite government action. For politicians who want to become partners in creating a world where the winner takes all isn't the objective, resources will need to replace the rhetoric.

Tiffany McHugh is actively involved in creating community enterprise in the Core area of Regina.

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The Next Step

The need for a Saskatchewan Anti-Poverty Act

by Peter Gilmer



Bonnie Morton feeding anti-poverty activists.

The United Nations has declared the period from 1997 - 2006 the "International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty." This declaration provides an important opportunity for the people of Saskatchewan to consider what actions the Saskatchewan government should take to eradicate poverty inside its own borders.

In 1976 the Saskatchewan government, along with its provincial counterparts and the federal government, signed the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights. This committed Saskatchewan to the ongoing improvement of the lives of low-income people and called for the immediate implementation of tangible ways of lessening poverty. Included in this covenant was the right to an adequate income for those in need. Now is the time for the provincial government, in conjunction with grass roots organizations, to act decisively on these commitments.

Toward that end the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM) is calling on the government of Saskatchewan to accelerate a process of consultation with anti-poverty groups and low-income people with the expressed purpose of jointly producing and implementing a comprehensive Saskatchewan Anti-Poverty Act or Plan by the year 2000.

On November 1, 1997 RAPM held an Anti-Poverty Parley which brought together local community organiza-

tions, low-income people and representatives of the provincial government to discuss ways of eradicating poverty in Saskatchewan.

Community groups reiterated two components of the 1997 Saskatchewan Alternative Budget of Choice produced by the Saskatchewan Coalition for Social Justice. First that the eradication of poverty should be a major priority of economic policy with public fiscal policy taking concrete measures to raise everyone's income above

the poverty line, whether that income is derived through employment or transfer payments.

Secondly that the construction of a fairer tax system and the redistribution of the wealth gained from the province's natural resources were key factors in moving towards a more equitable distribution of wealth in Saskatchewan. Parley participants were impressed by the additional \$423 million the Alternative Budget of Choice came up with through minimal wealth redistribution measures aimed at the corporate sector, wealthy individuals and our natural resources. Obviously that amount of wealth would go a long way towards eliminating poverty in the province.

Issues discussed at the meeting included the need to raise the minimum wage above the poverty line and social assistance rates to a level that meets real basic needs. It was also agreed that we need to enshrine the rights lost

with the elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan into both the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code. Participants particularly supported the right to an adequate income, the right to work freely chosen, and the right to appeal decisions and treatment by the Department of Social Services.

On the employment side there were calls for a more equitable distribution of work as well as legislated pay and employment equity. The need to create more jobs through community economic development and an expanded worker co-operative sector were viewed as central to an anti-poverty economic development strategy. In the face of globalization and the imminent Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), it was believed that the province needs to develop a bulwark of social and economic protections for Saskatchewan people as well as a stronger locally-based economy rather than rolling over and playing dead for transnational capital.

The Anti-Poverty Parley was a small step toward a clear anti-poverty act or plan for the province. RAPM hopes that the process of grass roots consultations expands to the entire province and that more public discussion on eradicating poverty ensues. Given the fact that Saskatchewan continues to have an extremely high rate of poverty, child poverty and infant mortality, these issues need to be given the prominence they deserve.

In her report, "Sounding the Alarm: Poverty in Canada," Senator Erminie Joy Cohen stated, "We must not

continue to play at the edges of the problem by offering piecemeal solutions. The impacts and consequences of poverty are well known and well documented. We do not need more studies - we need the political will to begin a long-term strategy that is consistent with our international commitments to alleviate poverty."

Senator Cohen's words were directed at the federal government but they are equally applicable at the provincial level. Rather than playing around the edges of poverty, Saskatchewan needs a clear jobs and incomes policy. While it is rarely said in policy circles, the most obvious problem for low-income people is simply that their incomes are too low.

While the Saskatchewan government has done an admirable job pushing for national standards for social programs, it is time to take a real leadership role by moving ahead and setting an example for the rest of the country, as we have in the past with medicare and other groundbreaking social legislation.

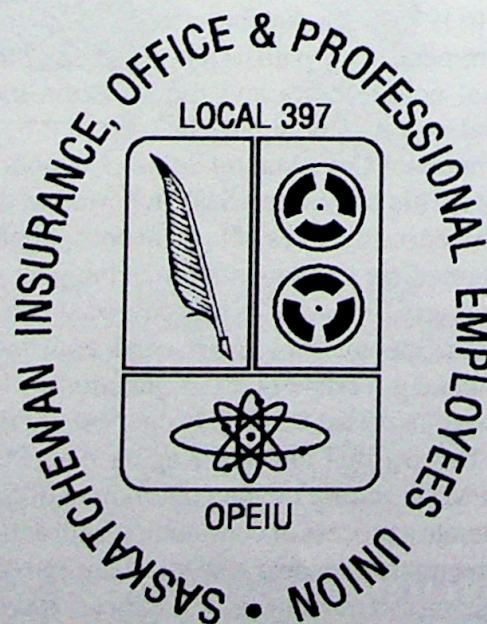
1997 saw the enactment of the Saskatchewan Action Plan For Children which will play a significant role in dealing with many of the symptoms of poverty. Let's take the next step by developing the plan and legislation which will deal with its root causes.

Peter Gilmer is an economic justice advocate with the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry.

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Fighting for Basic Human Rights

There's more than one way to fight poverty.

by Bonnie Morton

We have witnessed many regressive changes to the social and economic fabric of our country, especially over the past ten years. But none have been more noticeable than those occurring in the past two years.

Some people would like you to believe that high unemployment rates, poverty, hunger and the inability to provide necessary social programs are due to an enormous increase in laziness and ignorance.

Yet many political actions have taken place since the early 1970s which have created the social inequities we face today. During the early 1970s the practice of reducing taxation for large corporations and wealthy people (including the practice of deferred taxation) began. Over the past 20 years further reductions in taxation to large corporations and wealthy people have substantially reduced the amount of revenue collected on the wealth generated in Canada.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the Canadian government entered into free trade agreements, first with the United States, and then with Mexico and Chile. These agreements have had a dramatic negative impact on jobs and the creation of future jobs in Canada. Under the agreements with the U.S., American officials identified our social programs as unfair subsidies.

To address this issue our federal government reduced its financial and personal responsibilities to social programs under the guise of deficit reduction by reducing transfer payments to the provinces. The provinces, in turn are either drastically reducing programs and services or eliminating them. Now our social programs are under attack by the U.S. and the federal and provincial governments as well.

Political and economic decisions have and continue to be made without the consultation of the public, thereby eliminating jobs and creating large gaps between the minimum wage and the cost of living. At the same time, social programs that are needed during economic hard times are being either severely reduced or totally axed. Today's reality is that we have an economy that is failing the people, not the people failing.

So what do we do? Do we just give up? How many times have we heard, or even said to ourselves, "what can

we do? They are the government."

But as citizens living in a society that is believed to be a democracy, we have not only the right, but the responsibility to stand up and protect ourselves against impoverishment.

There are a number of ways in which we could do this. We could protest, lobby, incite civil disobedience, and if pushed far enough, even enter into civil war.

Over the past 12 years another alternative for protecting our social and economic rights has been utilized: the use of our court system and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This seems to be one option some low-income Canadians are beginning to turn to.

We are already aware that justice through our court system is not a swift process, and that equality rights challenges are a new concept within this system. With these factors taken into consideration, it should come as no surprise that we have not had substantial victories within the court system in the area of social and economic rights.

In the later part of the 1980s, a funding program called the Court Challenges Program was put in place by the federal government so that low-income people could use the courts and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to protect themselves from different forms of discrimination. This funding is used to take the federal government to court, but it can't be used for litigation against provincial governments.

In the late 1980s the Court Challenges Program developed a committee to deal specifically with social and economic rights, called the Charter Committee on Poverty Issues (CCPI). This committee's membership is comprised of two-thirds low-income people, and they take an active role in developing cases that go before the courts. In the past, cases were taken against the federal government. But the reality has been and continues to be that the majority of the human rights violations in the area of social and economic rights have been committed by provincial governments.

Until 1996 the federal government had a more direct responsibility to protect the social and economic rights of Canadians. In 1996 the federal government substantially

reduced the amount of money it would provide to provinces for social programs, and turned over the responsibility of how to spend the federal money to the provinces. The provinces now have all the power to decide how to spend the reduced federal government's financial contributions for social programs, yet the people most affected by these decisions have no financial means to challenge those decisions.

While there are no funds available for litigation against provincial governments, this hasn't stopped low-income people from taking action.

In Saskatchewan the provincial Tory government under Grant Devine was taken to task for discriminatory practices within the Department of Social Services. Single employable people received \$55 a month less on social assistance than married people.

This was challenged by Murray Chambers, a Saskatoon man on welfare, who took the provincial government to court because its welfare rates discriminated on the basis of marital status.

The outcome taught those fighting these battles a very valuable lesson. Instead of bringing single employables up to the same level as married people, the benefit level for married people was reduced to the same level as single employables.

The idea of fighting for equality is not to lower the standards of one sector, but to improve the level of standards for the most disadvantaged, and this has been the finding of the Supreme Court of Canada in recent years. Although the Chambers case was won (proving discrimination), it was lost because it lowered the benefit levels for married people, placing them at the same economic disadvantage as single employables, and did nothing to improve the benefit levels for single employables.

A case that the CCPI intervened in, known as the Hastings County case, was a definite win for protecting the rights of people on welfare. Municipal politicians in Hastings County, Ontario wanted to have access to the names of people on welfare in their municipality. They stated they wanted these names so they could monitor people on welfare. This was challenged and found to be illegal as it contravened the Privacy Act. This ruling means that no municipal officials have the right to gain access to the names of people on

welfare.

These are only two examples of cases that have been fought on the provincial level. CCPI has been involved in several other cases and has a fairly good track record for winning its cases.

The outcome and impact of a case is not as simple as winning or losing the case. The following two cases are prime examples.

A woman challenged the federal government on the issue of not being able to claim child care costs as a business expense. It became known as the Symes case.

CCPI intervened in this case. Although Symes lost her case, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that (1) Canadians have the right to use the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in challenging taxation, as well as social and economic policies, (2) that the interpretation of statutes on social and economic issues must be consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and (3) that social and economic issues do not have to be deferred to Parliament, but can be challenged within the courts. These rulings were important to low-income people, as they have made it possible for future taxation, and other social and economic challenges.

Another case that challenged the federal government was the Tibideau case. In this case a woman challenged the fact that parents *paying* child support received a tax break, while the parents *receiving* child support payments were taxed. This case was lost, but the research and publicity surrounding this issue put pressure on the federal government to make the changes that were

called for in the legal challenge. The parent paying child support no longer gets the tax break, and the parent receiving the child support payments is no longer taxed on this money.

Although these two cases seemed to have been lost, they really won in many ways. Sometimes these challenges act as political pressure even though that was not the initial intent.

Securing social and economic rights seem to be never ending. The present government practice to hack and slash social and economic programs and services for low-income people is a prime example of the need to continue to chal-



Murray Chambers, a Saskatoon man on welfare, took the provincial government to court.

lenge governments by whatever means necessary to secure these rights for all Canadians.

Low-income Canadians are also using the United Nations to put pressure on our governments. In 1993 CCPI and the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) presented a case to the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Committee of the United Nations against the Canadian government. These two Canadian organizations were able to show that the Canadian government was not living up to its obligations to the international treaties it has signed, specifically the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant.

This UN Committee agreed that the Canadian government had violated several social and economic rights of its citizens. It recommended that Canada incorporate social and economic rights within our human rights legislation, take concrete government action to eliminate food banks, restore funding to the Court Challenges Program and that funding also be provided for Charter challenges by disadvantaged Canadians to provincial legislation, that the Canadian judiciary be provided with training courses on Canada's obligations under the Covenant and on their effect on the interpretation and application of Canadian law, and that Canadian courts continue to adopt a broad approach to the interpretation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and of human rights legislation so as to provide appropriate remedies against violations of social and economic rights in Canada.

CCPI, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and NAPO also appeared before this UN committee in 1995. The three Canadian organizations briefed the committee that the federal government was eliminating the Canada Assistance Plan, and reducing funding to the provinces for social programs and services.

The UN body asked Canada to report to the commit-

tee and to explain how these actions will affect Canada's obligations to the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Covenant.

Canada has prepared its report and will be presenting its case to this committee before the end of the year. It will be interesting to see how our federal government explains the negative impact of the dismantling of social programs to its UN partners.

The social and economic problems we face today are due to a number of political and economic decisions that have been made over time. Therefore it stands to reason that the solutions to these problems will not be swift or simple.

Canadians are entitled to social and economic rights, not only for the rich, but for the disadvantaged as well. It is our responsibility to take whatever actions are necessary to secure these rights. We put our faith and trust in our governments to ensure certain basic human rights. The most basic of these are social and economic rights. It is understood by the UN that if people do not have social and economic rights, they can't fully participate in their civil and political rights. This is the reality in Canada today.

It is one thing to say we are entitled to these rights, but it takes work and commitment by all Canadians to make these rights real and to maintain them. If we truly believe these are our rights, then the time has come for us to protest, lobby, commit civil disobedience when our governments won't listen, use the court system to legally challenge our governments, and use the UN to pressure our governments.

If these rights are not going to be secured by political will, then they need to be secured by the will and action of the people.

Bonnie Morton is a human rights activist.

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#103, 2709-12th Avenue, Regina, SK S4T 1J3
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How to Challenge Poor-Bashing

Some suggestions that you can use.

by Jean Swanson

Poor-bashing is insidious. It creeps into our attitudes unbeknownst to us. It saturates our customs and our groups. It permeates government policies. How can we challenge it effectively? Here are some ways to get started:

Check out your own attitude

Pam Coates likes to compare her own attitude against men with some people's attitudes toward people who are poor. Pam is a single parent on welfare who works with One Voice for All, a Saint John, New Brunswick anti-poverty group, and is on the board of the National Anti-Poverty Organization.

"I've always believed that men are evils we have to put up with. But I realize that's men-bashing. We all have these kinds of attitudes. Unless we're aware of them in ourselves, we can't stop it."

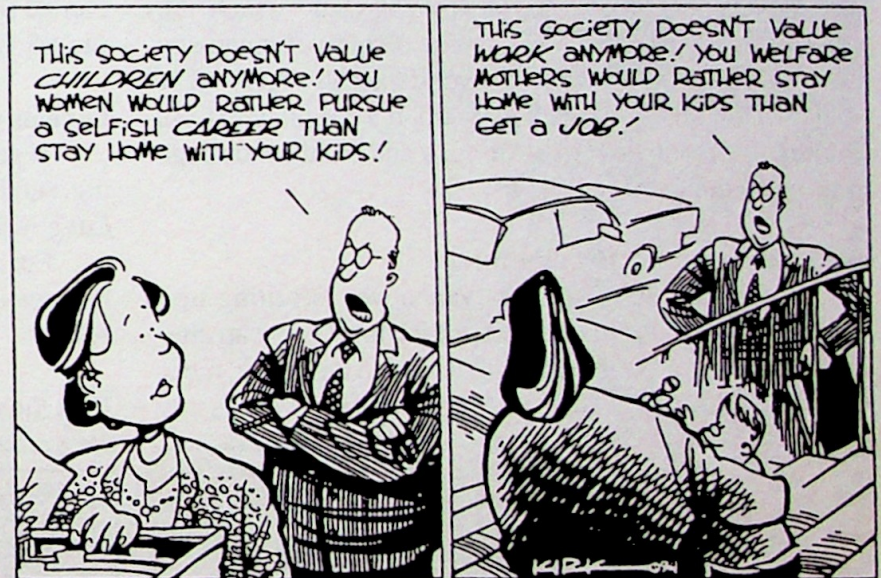
"Everyone puts the poor in a barrel," says Pam. "They say we're the worst creatures on the earth. We need to realize that we're all human beings and we all have a right to be here."

"If you're going to stop poor-bashing, you have to look at your attitude."

Check out your own group

Does your group unconsciously exclude low-income people from participating? Lots of groups do. They could be churches, unions, women's groups, political parties, even anti-poverty groups. Excluding the poor from your group is a form of poor-bashing because it keeps voices of people who are poor silent. Here are some ways of including low-income people in your groups and events:

- ◆ Provide bus fare, gas money or rides, and childcare to people who need it.



- ◆ Have a welcoming attitude and respect for all people in your group.
- ◆ Leave space for all people in the group to have their say. Listen when they speak.
- ◆ For conferences, dances and fun events, charge "x amount or what you can afford." Even fee schedules which require, say, \$5 for people without paid jobs and \$10 for people with paid jobs will exclude people on welfare.

Get ELP's Stop Poor-Bashing poster

End Legislated Poverty in Vancouver has an 11 by 17 inch poster featuring cartoons by Maureen Davis, *The Long Haul's* cartoonist. Call ELP at (604) 879-1209 for your copy of the poster. Then get to work putting it up in politicians' offices, libraries, social services offices, and community agencies. Try to get it up in news rooms of your local newspapers, TV and radio stations.

Get politicians to sign the pledge

ELP has a political candidates pledge for candidates to sign. It says they promise not to stereotype, pity, patron-

ize or promote hatred against low-income people; will defend low-income people against those who do this; won't try to win votes by scapegoating low-income people; won't support policies or laws that assume low-income people are to blame for poverty; won't support policies or laws that create more poverty rather than jobs; and won't support workfare programs.

Send a copy of your signed pledge to ELP so we'll know who has signed it. Then it's up to us to monitor the candidate and see if they stay true to the pledge. (Groups outside British Columbia can run similar campaigns.)

Make your own Macaroni Award

The Winnipeg-based Community Action on Poverty group has developed a "Macaroni Award" which they present to poor-bashers for "public display of mean-spirited poor-bashing above and beyond the call of normal venality." ELP has a copy of the Award. It's alright with Community Action on Poverty if we copy and use them throughout the country.

Set up a media watch committee

The Unitarian Church in Vancouver is setting up a media watch committee so that church members can challenge media who poor-bash with letters to the editor, meetings with editorial boards, and other actions if necessary.

They plan to make a kit to help give their media watch committee the tools they need to do a good job. When the kit is ready, they will share it with others. Call ELP for details.

Make a personal commitment

Make a personal commitment to challenge poor-bashing wherever you hear it. If it's a politician or media, speak to them, or write a letter pointing out that they have poor-bashed and why it's bad. Get unions, churches and groups that you belong to, to do the same. If it's a family member or friend, point it out when you hear poor-bashing, and explain why it's bad. It can even be your own self. If you catch yourself saying poor-bashing words, apologize. We can all find ourselves poor-bashing sometimes, even people who are poor.

Give us your ideas

If you have some ideas on how to challenge poor-bashing, send them to ELP and we'll print some of them in *The Long Haul* to share with other anti-poverty activists.

For more information contact ELP, #211-456 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3 or phone (604) 879-1209.

Jean Swanson works at End Legislated Poverty and is on the executive of the National Anti-Poverty Organization.

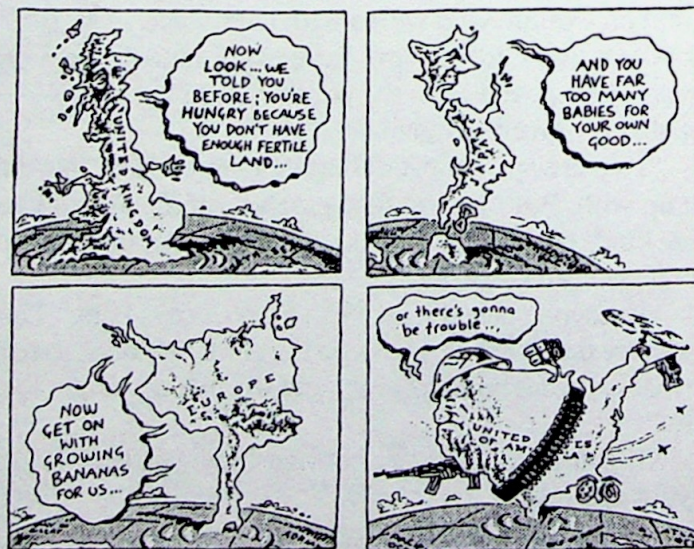
Save Democracy Stop the MAI

The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) currently being negotiated by the 29 countries that comprise the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will constitute a bill of rights for transnational corporations. Specifically, the MAI will:

- prohibit the application of performance requirements on foreign-based companies;
- give corporations the right to sue governments if environmental laws hurt their business;
- prevent countries from imposing economic sanctions like those used to end Apartheid;
- rollback protection for Canadian culture;
- set the stage for two-tiered health care.



Canadian Union of
Public Employees
Saskatchewan Division



**CUPE Local 2419
opposes
the MAI!**

Who Benefits from Poor-Bashing?

Why the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor.

by Jean Swanson

Here are some ways that the rich and powerful benefit from poor-bashing:

Blaming the poor for poverty means we don't have to look at economic policies that cause poverty. We don't have to look at changing politicians, or free trade, or how corporations are behaving. Poor-bashing takes the heat off corporations and governments. If everyone is focused on bashing the poor, the richest one percent of Canadians who own more than the poorest 80 percent put together won't have to face new laws to make them share that wealth with the poor.

Employers who want cheap labour also benefit from poor-bashing. Poor-bashing justifies workfare which gives employers free or subsidized workers, and that means their profits can be higher.

Poor-bashing undermines support for social programs that people who are poor use: When the programs get cut back, people have to look for any type of unsafe, low-paid job. This benefits employers who want their employees to work under these conditions.

In 1994 in British Columbia, one in six residents was on welfare at some point during the year. That's how important the program is. To get on welfare you have to have very few assets and no other source of support. What will happen in your family and in your community if people in need are denied welfare? Will your family be able to pick up the bill privately? Will your neighbourhood be able to handle people with no means of support? We need the social programs that poor-bashing undermines.

Blaming the poor for poverty means we don't have to look at economic policies that cause poverty. We don't have to look at changing politicians, or free trade, or how corporations are behaving. Poor-bashing takes the heat off corporations and governments. If everyone is focused on bashing the poor, the richest one percent of Canadians who own more than the poorest 80 percent put together won't have to face new laws to make them share that wealth with the poor.



PC World Occupation: A Line In The Sand

**“Without a minimum of hope
we cannot so much as start the struggle.”**

Paulo Freire

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in the community,
in collective bargaining,
in the workplace,

And in the classroom.

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Poverty & Pay Equity

by George Manz



photo: Darrell Ortman

"Pay Equity Now!" That was one of the banners which the Pay Equity Coalition of Saskatchewan unfurled at the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's convention in October.

With so many women being grossly underpaid compared to their male counterparts who perform work of equal value for more pay, you would think the Saskatchewan NDP government would have introduced pay equity

legislation by now, something the New Democratic Party promised during the 1991 provincial election.

But so far they've produced nothing but empty promises.

So when the SFL invited Premier Roy Romanow to speak at their convention, they bombarded him with questions about pay equity.

"The premier appeared to be displeased by the strong showing of support for women's economic equality," said Aina Kagis, chair of the coalition. "While the premier made reference to the shocking statistics about child poverty, he appears not to understand that poor children often have poor mothers."

Mandatory pay equity legislation in Saskatchewan would be one more device which trade union and anti-poverty activists could use to improve the lives of women and poor people in the province.

George Manz is the editor of Briarpatch magazine.



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Families on the Fault Line

Families on the Fault Line:
America's Working Class Speaks
about the Family,
the Economy, Race and Ethnicity
by Lillian B. Rubin
Harper Collins, 1994.

reviewed by Sandy Cameron

Using the model of skilled, sensitive interviews with working class families that she employed in her previous book, *Worlds of Pain*, Lillian Rubin has recorded the voices of working class men and women from different racial backgrounds after two decades of disappearing jobs and declining incomes.

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Families on the Fault Line documents an American working class in extreme crisis, and Rubin's insights are as valid for Canada as they are for the U.S.

The myth that America is a classless society has made working class families and their problems invisible, and has impaired the ability of working people to join together to act on their own behalf.

Yet working class families are the largest group of families in the U.S., and the largest part of the work-force. They work, for the most part, at the lower levels of the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy. They probably don't have more than high school with some technical training, generally work for an hourly rate rather than a weekly wage, and reap no benefits from the pitifully small handouts to the poor or the huge subsidies to the rich.

They are people who live on the edge. Illness, accidents, or unemployment can throw them into the abyss.

Today they are frightened. The bills keep coming, and the decent jobs

and wages keep diminishing. Frightened families mean angry people, but because American workers have such a weak class analysis, this anger is directed at those below, rather than those

Frightened families mean angry people. This anger is often directed at those below, rather than those above.

above.

In other words, although working class families have become increasingly vulnerable, class consciousness has not increased. Instead of class anger, we see racial anger, and random anger against politicians, bureaucrats, so-called welfare bums (many working class families are only one job away from welfare), homosexuals, immigrants and women.

Lack of a meaningful class analysis in Canada is shown by the shift of some working people to the Reform Party with its corporate funding, corporate agenda, and undertones of racism.

Families on the Fault Line brings hope with the clarity of its analysis. If we can understand whose interests are being protected, and whose interests are being ignored, we will be in a better position to make informed decisions. As the Canadian Union of Postal Workers said in its ad in a recent issue of *Briarpatch*, "The struggle for justice and rights is compromised by those who believe that their interests and the boss's are the same."

Sandy Cameron is a volunteer with the End Legislated Poverty coalition and the Carnegie Community Centre in Vancouver.

Doug Coupar
Advisor

Government Relations and Public Policy
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Joss MacLennan Design
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First they came for people on welfare, and I did not speak because I was not poor;

Then they came for employment equity, and I did not speak because I was not a member of a minority;

Then they came for health care, and I did not speak because I was not sick;

Then they came for education, and I did not speak because I did not have children;

Then they came for pensions, and I did not speak because I was still young;

Then they came for my union contract, and I did not speak because I didn't think that I needed my union;

Finally they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out.

So speak out now, before it's too late!

from the Canadian Association of Labour Media/CUPE.

BOMBS AWAY

"We already have enough bombs to blow up the world ten times over, so a few more can't hurt."

- Dana Rohrabacher,
Republican Congressman from California.
Rohrabacher helped found an organization
called the Committee for the Prevention of
Nuclear Peace. In a speech in honour of Oliver
North, Rohrabacher said, "Ollie is a great
example to youth."



COKE CLASSIC

"If you don't have an enemy, the best thing is you create one. That's the only way you can have a war."

- Roberto Goizueta,
the long-time Coca-Cola CEO, who died in October.
Goizueta, who had worked for Coca-Cola in Cuba,
fled the country in 1959 after Castro took power.



BACK FROM THE DEAD

"He's got a great vision for this country, to go back to the ideals of those wise old dead white guys that made up the country in the first place."

- Charlton Heston, actor,
praising Illinois Republican candidate Al Salvi.

Say WHAT??

HANG 'EM HIGH

"To me, it is treason. I mean, if the governor of Illinois was saying the things [René] Lévesque said, we would hang him. And then we would try him later, I suppose."

- Paul Robinson,
former U.S. Ambassador to Canada during Ronald
Reagan's presidency. Robinson was totally opposed to
the Quebec premier's support for separatism.



THE RISE AND FALL

"When the markets fall drastically, so does the male sexual organ. When a man is sexually impotent, he loses confidence and has trouble making financial decisions."

- Dr. Alexander Oshanyesky,
an Israeli specialist on blood-vessel problems,
after the world-wide stock market crash in
October.

SOME LIFE-GUARD

"What do you do when your competitor's drowning? Get a live hose and stick it in his mouth."

- Ray Kroc,
founder of McDonald's Restaurants.

Why Poverty?

The cure lies in prevention.

by Eldon Anderson



Surely any useful discussion of poverty must focus not on poverty alone, but what can be done about it. In spite of the rhetoric of such business apologists as the Fraser Institute which would like to define away poverty, we do have a very serious and growing problem in Canada. One strong indicator of poverty is the number of poor children, which have increased by 46 percent in the last seven years. In the same reasonably prosperous period in our nation, the number of poor single-parent families went up 58 percent. In mid-1997, Saskatchewan had over 78,000 people on welfare.

An emphasis on emergency measures to deal with such basic needs as food, clothing and shelter are of course necessary in the short run. However, any individual or agency worthy of its pledge must also give thought and action to the prevention of poverty. We all suffer from the "fruits" of poverty, even if it is only embarrassment, because we do too little at the roots. Short run measures such as most food banks are band-aids, while longer run projects such as responsible parenting education can help change the situation. In fairness, a limited number of larger food banks like the one in Regina have in recent years implemented programs to help user/clients learn lifeskills. These innovations get to the root, instead of "just filling bellies for the moment" as one Regina & District Food bank director stated.

In surveying the situation which isn't changing for the better in spite of

the efforts of countless agencies and governments, one is almost overcome with feelings of sadness, anger and pessimism. Canada, among the best countries in the world socially, economically and politically, with a relatively humane approach to people and the environment, has millions of its citizens existing without enough or a stable supply of the bare essentials. This injustice is all the more poignant when one contemplates the fact we have more than enough material resources, skills and abilities for all to have enough.

Why poverty? Some who study the problem and presumably also have hearts for the less fortunate, believe welfare rates should be more generous. A good case can be made for higher welfare rates if one accepts the fact that deprivation isn't a good incentive to do better. It is true that some people are poor because they lack the will to work. Such people, who are a minority of those on welfare, make a bad name for the majority who are trying to become self-sufficient.

Canada's acceptance of aspects of the welfare state in the 1940s and 1950s resulted from people's movements such as "farm progressives" and a new political party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. The old-line parties, firmly attached to a savagely capitalistic approach, were goaded into action on such much needed measures as pensions and health services. Untold thousands, many of whom would otherwise have been wards of the state, were able to provide for themselves and thus enjoy a better life because of these

humane programs, aided by co-operatives and trade unions. Now these programs are being diminished in some cases, or even lost, and in the retrogressive process the rich are rapidly getting richer, and the poor, are becoming poorer and more numerous.

We are reverting to a society based solely on competition and so-called free enterprise which incidentally is neither free nor very enterprising. All this results from destructive measures such as the free trade agreement, and its attendant globalization wherein corporations become fewer and larger as they seek greater profits regardless of the needs or wishes of people, local governments or the environment. They destroy stability and community in their lust for power and profit.

The cure for poverty lies in prevention. We can never eliminate all of it. Responsible, caring people who will make an effort to become informed and politically active and in the process elect responsible governments at all levels can change things for the better. They'll be diligent and co-operative, fighting today's tendency to greed, speed and self-seeking.

Eldon Anderson is past president of the Regina Council on Social Development, and chairperson of the board of the Regina & District Food Bank. He served on the Mayor's Board of Inquiry into Hunger.

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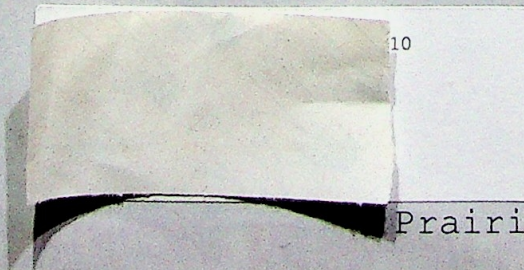
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